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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum

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IMPLICATIONS OF KHRUSHCHEV'S
MESSAGE OF 28 OCTOBER

29 October 1962

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IMPLICATIONS OF KHRUSHCHEV'S MESSAGE
OF 28 OCTOBER

General

1. The offer to dismantle the Soviet bases in Cuba under UN supervision is a clear backdown with the only quid pro quo exacted a US promise not to invade Cuba. This action appears to have been motivated almost entirely by fear that US military action against Cuba and the Soviet bases there was imminent. The Soviet leadership saw that the USSR would either have to swallow this, with enormous damage to its world position, or make a response which, given the state of mind they believed existed in the US, would carry risks they could not accept of escalation to general war.

2. There does not appear to be much danger that the Soviets will attempt to delay implementation of the promise to dismantle and inspect. The "wish" that the US discontinue aircraft reconnaissance was almost certainly not intended to provide a pretext for procrastination. If the US insists upon initial steps to get observation under way in Cuba within a day or two, the Soviet negotiators are unlikely to stall.*

3. The letter carries no hint of any demand for reciprocal concessions elsewhere. At most a moral obligation is laid on the US to behave with similar restraint in other dangerous areas of conflict. The letter does indicate that the Soviets wish to take up negotiations with the US on broader issues, in hopes of re-establishing Soviet prestige.

Implications for Berlin

4. While Berlin is not specifically mentioned in the letter, the analogy of blockaded Cuba to surrounded Berlin is a close one. The Soviets may feel that their behavior

*For a discussion of some of the immediate issues involved in implementation of an agreement, see Annex

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over Cuba will win them broader support for a settlement in Berlin which makes some concessions to Soviet interests there. They will have difficulty in demonstrating, however, as the US did successfully in Cuba, that Berlin poses a large and immediate threat to peace which must be regulated by immediate concessions if war is to be avoided. In short, any Soviet move to activate the Berlin issue in the immediate aftermath of the Cuban affair is likely to start in a low key and be directed to an early face-saving adjustment. They may undertake no serious initiatives for a time. In the wake of a major defeat, they might prefer in accordance with characteristic Soviet behavior to "reappraise the balance of forces" and simply await the emergence of new opportunities for forward action.

5. There is one other possible line of Soviet behavior in the wake of Cuba. The Soviet leaders might conclude that US success in the Cuban crisis arose entirely from the great preponderance of power enjoyed by the US in the immediate area of contention, a situation which left the USSR no recourse except to action which carried unacceptable risks of nuclear war. Some of them might be tempted to believe that Berlin, where the situation of local power is reversed, could be handled by the USSR as the US has handled Cuba. There is, however, nothing in Soviet statements or conduct during the Cuban affair to suggest that this would be the course of action.

Internal USSR:

6. We do not know what convulsions may have occurred in the Soviet leadership over the Cuban issue. It is possible that the outcome will strengthen a viewpoint in the Soviet leadership that the policies of the last few years have in several areas committed the USSR beyond its important national interests and beyond the reach of its power. This might in time lead in the direction of altering the general Soviet approach to international politics.

The Communist Bloc:

7. The Soviet Union will probably be faced with a further open deterioration in its relations with Communist China. The Chinese will undoubtedly interpret Moscow's latest moves toward a solution of the Cuban crisis as weakness in the contest with "the imperialist enemy"

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and will exploit Khrushchev's backdown to undermine confidence in Khrushchev's leadership. In eastern Europe, Khrushchev's whole conduct of the affair--major risks followed by a major backdown--will undermine confidence in his leadership among the many Communists who have long harbored reservations about his policies. The East German leadership in particular will fear that it must now wait yet another turn for progress on the Berlin problem.

The Cuban Side

8. It appears that Castro was not consulted by Khrushchev on his recent approaches to President Kennedy. The public statement of the Cuban Government issued after the Khrushchev letter of 28 October indicates that Castro is acting on his own and is seeking desperately to retrieve some advantages for himself in a situation which he must regard as a disaster. Castro probably feels that he has been sold out, but his continuing dependence upon the Bloc is likely to restrain any temptation to renounce his relationship with the Bloc.

9. Castro has resigned himself to the withdrawal of Soviet offensive missile bases. His demands that any guarantee by the US of Cuban security be supplemented by cessation of the economic embargo, subversive activities directed against Cuba, violations of Cuban air and sea space, and withdrawal of the US Naval Base at Guantanamo may have been tossed out in the hope, which we believe to be entirely unrealistic, that the Soviets would work them into their agreement with the US. Regardless of how Castro may feel, however, he will probably have little leverage with the Soviets in any attempt to interfere with the implementation of an agreement on withdrawal of Soviet military equipment.

10. The withdrawal of Soviet missile bases will gravely affect Castro's position in Cuba. There will be a decline of his prestige among the population at large. More important, there will probably be serious differences between the "new" or Castroite Communists and the members of the Cuban Communist Party. Castro and his followers might go down in the turmoil, but we believe that Castro has a better than even chance of rallying forces loyal to him and of maintaining precarious control. In any event Castro's ability to survive

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will depend on the extent of continuing Soviet economic aid as well as on the policies pursued toward Cuba by the US and other American states.

Elsewhere in Latin America

11. Latin Americans, whether friendly or hostile to the US, will regard the missile withdrawal as a resounding US victory and a Soviet setback. Castro sympathizers in the area will be profoundly discouraged, and both they and the regular Communists will inevitably suffer considerable disillusion about the USSR's capacity and reliability as a protector in this hemisphere. We see no way in which the Soviets can, for a long time to come, compensate for this loss so far as Latin American Communists and Castroists are concerned.

12. Some Latin American governments which are strongly anti-Communist and anti-Castro, while applauding US success in obtaining the removal of Soviet missile bases, will be quick to deplore US willingness to give assurances for the continuation of a Communist regime in Cuba. Some will accuse the US of having stopped short of achieving essential goals. They will urge a continuation of pressures on Castro. The less militantly anti-Castro governments, though perfectly happy to see Castro rendered militarily weak or impotent, would probably tend to resist any US policy which appeared to reflect a determination to dictate the internal outcome in Cuba.

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ANNEX: PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN THE DISARMING OF CUBA

1. The USSR has avoided any description or definition of Soviet weapons in Cuba, and Khrushchev has left it to the US to choose which it shall term "defensive" and which "offensive." The distinctions drawn by the US in recent weeks make logical the argument that surface-to-surface missiles and bombers are offensive, whereas surface-to-air missiles, coastal defense cruise missiles, missile patrol boats, and fighters are defensive.

2. The USSR would accept these lists, and world opinion in general would regard the removal of surface-to-surface missiles and bombers as consonant with our aims. On the other hand, US demand for the removal of fighters or other weapons which it has already termed defensive would produce some Soviet resistance and would be generally interpreted as an attempt to disarm Cuba against a possible invasion. Castro might try to oppose removal of the bombers, claiming ownership of them, but they have never been flown in Cuba, and we believe the Soviets would override such complaints.

3. Khrushchev's letter of 28 October states flatly that, in view of US assurances against an invasion, Soviet military assistance has become unnecessary. Earlier, he indicated that, if the US gave such assurances, the need for Soviet military specialists in Cuba would disappear. The USSR might agree to a demand that all military specialists return to the Soviet Union, although some pressure might be required to extract this agreement and it might subsequently be violated. World opinion would probably consider a US demand for withdrawal of military specialists as not excessively onerous or vindictive.

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